

# What is Physical Education in Primary Schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand?

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*Physical education has historically held an important place as an identified learning area within the wider New Zealand curriculum. While consistently present, the way that physical education has been conceptualised and implemented has evolved and changed over time. This paper considers the changes that have occurred in the teaching of physical education in primary schools (5 years - 12 years) since the introduction of the Health and Physical Education in New Zealand Curriculum (1999). The potential educative value of physical education in New Zealand has been strengthened by the conceptual and philosophical framework underpinning the Health and Physical Education learning area within the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). While acknowledging that this potential exists, it should be noted that there is concern about the quality of physical education as it actually occurs within New Zealand primary schools. This paper attempts to gain a greater understanding of the situation by exploring: the Health and Physical Education Curriculum; the conceptual confusion about what physical education is; the role of external providers in primary schools; the preparation of primary teachers to teach physical education; and by examining the research on primary school physical education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This exploration has been informed by an analysis of a variety of texts, including curriculum documents that have informed physical education over the last fifteen years.*

## The Health and Physical Education Curriculum in New Zealand

As identified in a number of the papers in this current issue, physical education in New Zealand has undergone substantial philosophical and conceptual change over the last twenty years (Culpan, 2008). This change process has been strongly influenced by the development of the *Health and Physical Education in New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) which was produced as a supporting document for the learning area within the Curriculum Framework. The 1999 curriculum statement superseded the 1987 Physical Education Syllabus, and its introduction signalled an extensive shift in the thinking and practice of physical education (Culpan, 2008). This shift contextualised physical education as socio-cultural and critical (Fitzpatrick, 2009) and built on the scientised or technocratic framework that had shaped physical education in New Zealand up to this point. As a consequence, the 1999 Curriculum Statement received extensive commentary on its worthiness while also attracting considerable critique.

The philosophical and conceptual framework underpinning the *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) had considerable influence on the development of the Health and Physical Education learning area within the current *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum* includes an all-encompassing epistemological and pedagogical framework that underpins the eight learning areas identified within the document. The document presents more like a strategic plan than a curriculum document comprising of a vision, principles, values, key competencies, a section on effective pedagogy, a curriculum framework, and guidelines for each of the eight learning areas.

The *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999), in contrast, contained a detailed description of the structural framework (Figure 1) underlying the Health and Physical Education Achievement Objectives (AOs) which were listed for each of the eight levels (Year 0 - Year 13) of the curriculum. This description was intended to give further direction for the planning and implementation of physical education lessons. It appeared, however, to offer both advantages and disadvantages for teachers. For teachers with a good understanding of physical education it extended thinking and allowed for development, but for teachers with a limited understanding of physical education, particularly generalist teachers, it seemed overly comprehensive and daunting. One problem for many teachers was that the philosophical shift underpinning the conceptual framework meant that the “new” physical education was very different to the way in which teachers had experienced the subject themselves. This, coupled with limited physical education content hours within pre-service degrees, meant that many classroom teachers teaching physical education found it challenging to fully grasp the intent of the conceptual framework underpinning physical education (Ministry of Education, 2002).

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|  | <b>General Aims</b><br>The aims are for students to: | <b>I</b> develop the knowledge, understandings, skills, and attitudes needed to maintain and enhance personal health and physical development;  | <b>II</b> develop motor skills through movement, acquire knowledge and understandings about movement, and develop positive attitudes towards physical activity;  | <b>C</b> develop understandings, skills, and attitudes that enhance interactions and relationships with other people;  | <b>D</b> participate in creating healthy communities and environments by taking responsible and critical action.  |
|  | <b>Strands</b>                                       | <b>A</b> Personal Health and Physical Development   | <b>B</b> Movement Concepts and Motor Skills  | <b>C</b> Relationships with Other People   | <b>D</b> Healthy Communities and Environments   |
|  | <b>Achievement Aims</b><br>Students will:            | <b>A1</b> Personal growth and development: gain understandings and skills to manage and adjust to the processes of growth and maturation;<br><b>A2</b> Regular physical activity: understand and appreciate, as a result of experience, the contribution of physical activity to personal well-being;<br><b>A3</b> Safety and risk management: meet and manage challenges and risks in positive, health-enhancing ways;<br><b>A4</b> Personal identity and self-worth: analyse attitudes and values and take actions that contribute to their personal identity and self-worth. (In this document, “personal identity and self-worth” includes the idea of self-concept, self-confidence, and self-esteem.) | <b>B1</b> Movement skills: develop and apply, in context, a wide range of movement skills and facilitate the development of physical competence;<br><b>B2</b> Positive attitudes and challenge: develop a positive attitude towards physical activity by accepting challenges and extending their potential capabilities and experiences;<br><b>B3</b> Science and technology: develop and apply a knowledge and understanding of the scientific, technological, and environmental factors that influence movement;<br><b>B4</b> Social and cultural factors: develop and apply knowledge and understanding of the social and cultural factors that influence people's involvement in physical activity. | <b>C1</b> Relationships: come to understand the nature of relationships;<br><b>C2</b> Identity, sensitivity, and respect: increase their understanding of personal identity and develop sensitivity to, and respect for, other people;<br><b>C3</b> Interpersonal skills: use interpersonal skills effectively to enhance relationships. | <b>D1</b> Societal attitudes and beliefs: find out how societal attitudes, values, beliefs, and practices affect wellbeing;<br><b>D2</b> Community resources: identify the functions of recreation and services that support well-being, find out about their availability, and identify the roles of individuals and groups that contribute to them;<br><b>D3</b> Rights, responsibilities, and laws: understand the rights and responsibilities, laws, policies, and practices that relate to people's wellbeing;<br><b>D4</b> People and the environment: understand the interdependence between people and their surroundings and use this understanding to help create healthy environments. |
|  | <b>Underlying Concepts</b>                           | <b>A1</b> Personal growth and development<br><b>A2</b> Regular physical activity<br><b>A3</b> Safety and risk management<br><b>A4</b> Personal identity and self-worth  | <b>B1</b> Movement skills<br><b>B2</b> Positive attitudes and challenge<br><b>B3</b> Science and technology<br><b>B4</b> Social and cultural factors   | <b>C1</b> Relationships<br><b>C2</b> Identity, sensitivity, and respect<br><b>C3</b> Interpersonal skills  | <b>D1</b> Societal attitudes and beliefs<br><b>D2</b> Community resources<br><b>D3</b> Rights, responsibilities, and laws<br><b>D4</b> People and the environment   |
|  | <b>Achievement Objectives at Each Level</b>          | <b>Focus</b><br><b>A1</b> Personal growth and development<br><b>A2</b> Regular physical activity<br><b>A3</b> Safety and risk management<br><b>A4</b> Personal identity and self-worth  | <b>Focus</b><br><b>B1</b> Movement skills<br><b>B2</b> Positive attitudes and challenge<br><b>B3</b> Science and technology<br><b>B4</b> Social and cultural factors   | <b>Focus</b><br><b>C1</b> Relationships<br><b>C2</b> Identity, sensitivity, and respect<br><b>C3</b> Interpersonal skills  | <b>Focus</b><br><b>D1</b> Societal attitudes and beliefs<br><b>D2</b> Community resources<br><b>D3</b> Rights, responsibilities, and laws<br><b>D4</b> People and the environment   |

Figure 1

The structural framework for curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 8-9)

The structure of this curriculum is based on general aims, strands, achievement aims, achievement objectives, underlying concepts, and key areas of learning

The high number of achievement objectives (AOs) was also problematic for many teachers and meeting them all was a challenge for specialist Health and Physical Education teachers let alone for generalist classroom teachers. The AOs were also the subject of major criticism in the Curriculum Stocktake Report (Ministry of Education, 2002) which argued that the extent to which the *New Zealand Curriculum*, as outlined in the statements, enabled teachers to provide comparable evidence of student achievements was limited by:

- the formulation of Achievement Objectives, which are not expressed in terms of *measurable* outcomes
- the reliance on teachers to translate Achievement Objectives into learning outcomes, and
- the reliance on non-standardised, school-based assessment, until the upper secondary stage of secondary education (p. 10).

As a consequence of these criticisms, the number of AOs was minimised in the 2007 *New Zealand Curriculum*. While the number of AOs was reduced, they were still not prescribed and were still open to interpretation by teachers and schools. This flexibility offered opportunities for innovation and for schools to meet the specific needs of their communities but gave limited specific direction to teachers. This lack of direction may have been confusing for classroom teachers trying to make sense of what and how to teach, especially where they had limited knowledge and confidence in teaching physical education.

Both the 1999 *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* statement and the 2007 *New Zealand Curriculum* have identified seven key areas of learning within Health and Physical Education. “The three learning areas most closely aligned with physical education are identified as physical activity, sport studies and outdoor education” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 22). One could argue, as many primary teachers have (Dyson & Shulruf, in preparation), that these learning areas may not be comprehensive enough, may be more suited to the secondary level, and may not be developmentally appropriate for the primary level. “Play” and “exploratory movement experiences” are two educational areas that one might expect in a primary physical education program that are not overtly stated in the document.

Another strong policy direction that emerged with the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) concerned an increased emphasis on the quality of teaching. This was motivated in part by the *Best Evidence Syntheses* (Ministry of Education, 2007), which reviewed research evidence in an attempt to provide relevant information on educational policy and practice. This approach included the Iterative Best Evidence Programme to synthesise with clarity, accessibility and rigour, the available research on best practice in teaching and learning (Alton-Lee, 2003; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). A direct result of the *Best Evidence Syntheses* has been an increased attention on teachers and how they teach and on student learning.

## Conceptual confusion

The *Health and Physical Education Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) developers introduced a radically different conceptualisation of health and physical education, which focused on more holistic

educational ideals and was grounded in socio-cultural and critical perspectives (Fitzpatrick, 2009). Driving this change was a desire to promote more socially just, inclusive and equitable practices in New Zealand society (Culpan, 2008) and the underpinning socio-critical humanistic philosophy was intended to help facilitate this outcome. It could be suggested, however, that the implementation of this curriculum has proven to be a challenge as many teachers have grappled with the philosophical shift in thinking and practices required for the effective implementation of a curriculum such as this (Burrows, 2004, 2011; Culpan, 2005, 2008, 2011). Indeed, understanding what an effective implementation of the philosophy looks like has remained elusive for many teachers.

One important underlying issue that has arisen as a consequence of these changes is the lack of a clear and consistent understanding of what physical education actually is. This uncertainty is problematic for teachers who are attempting to understand what physical education is trying to achieve (Culpan, 2005, 2008; Morgan & Hansen, 2008) and is particularly challenging for teachers who have been trained predominantly as generalist classroom teachers and have graduated with limited knowledge and experience in physical education.

A recent article, based on the experiences of a group of experienced New Zealand physical education advisors (Paterson, 2010), reported that the advisors believed that many primary teachers have a tendency to narrowly define physical education as sport, games and fitness:

*Teachers may still lack clarity about the differences between physical activity and physical education and for ease of organisation, opt for physical activity. This may be in the form of a whole class game, fitness circuits or running... There appears to be a sport emphasis in primary physical education and a fitness focus at primary level. (p. 13)*

In Australia, Morgan and Hansen (2007) stated that “many teachers (74%) continue to use the terms *PE*, *sports*, and *physical activity* interchangeably when describing lessons” (p. 102). The need for greater understanding of what physical education is and what it should look like in schools is evident, as is the need to work towards consistency and a mutual understanding between those involved in policy and those in practice (Culpan, 2005, 2008).

Culpan's observations reinforce Burrows' (2004) view that it was the curriculum's conceptual framework underpinning physical education, and the characteristics of physical education that had been difficult for many teachers to fully understand. While acknowledging the ongoing support for curriculum implementation by the Ministry of Education and other agencies, and the admirable progress teachers have made in schools, Culpan (2005) also suggests that there is still 'muddled thinking' at Ministry and policy level, particularly around the educative value of physical education. Misunderstanding and misleading definitions of physical education, including the place of sport and physical activity within physical education, at these levels has the potential for confusion as teachers try to reach an understanding about what the curriculum is trying to achieve. Sports Studies, for example, one of the key areas of learning introduced in Health and Physical Education New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1999) explores how students “identify how sporting experiences influence the development of people's physical and social skills. Students investigate and critically appraise the educative value of sport and consider the effects of sport from social, cultural, and scientific perspectives” (p. 44). This approach obviously differs substantially

from one underpinned by a 'performance sport' philosophy. One could ask is "sport studies" an appropriate key learning area for physical education at the primary level. Such confusion is not only limiting the implementation, and therefore the intended potential of the curriculum, but could also be a factor influencing the quality and indeed time spent on physical education in schools. Evidence from a recent study of classroom teachers in Auckland and Northland (Dyson & Schurf, in preparation) supports the finding that classroom teachers have a narrow definition of what physical education is. They refer to 'sport programmes in teaching time', 'school sport teams', 'games', 'teaching techniques and skills', and 'fitness' interchangeably with physical education. These findings support earlier ongoing debates associated with the place of sport within physical education (Grant & Pope, 2000; Stothart, 2000).

An 'essence statement' included in the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) defines physical education as it was introduced in the *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999). While it provides some intent as to the purpose of physical education, it is also open to interpretation and continues to cause confusion about what physical education should look like in schools. The essence statement states:

*In physical education, the focus is on movement and its contribution to the development of individuals and communities. By learning, in, through, and about movement, students gain an understanding that movement is integral to human expression and that it can contribute to people's pleasure and enhance their lives. They learn to understand, appreciate, and move their bodies, relate positively to others, and demonstrate constructive attitudes and values. This learning takes place as they engage in play, games, sport, exercise, recreation, adventure, and expressive movement in diverse physical and social environments. Physical education encourages students to engage in movement experiences that promote and support the development of physical and social skills. It fosters critical thinking and action and enables students to understand the role and significance of physical activity for individuals and society. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 23)*

The confusion associated with the definition of physical education, and the subsequent consequences, have been compounded by the removal of advisors (those who provide curriculum support to teachers in school) in physical education. These advisors have previously served a crucial role in helping teachers' understanding and knowledge of physical education. In many cases this removal of support may have encouraged teachers to seek external support in order to provide, what they believe to be, quality physical education (Dyson & Shulruf, in preparation).

## **External providers of physical education**

There is an increasing trend in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australian schools (Morgan & Hansen, 2007, 2008; Williams, Hay & Macdonald, in press) for the use of external out-sourcing or external providers to deliver what are perceived to be physical education activities. This is a trend that Williams et al. (in press) identified as being influenced by the neoliberal focus on outcomes over process, a belief that outcome is the most important thing as opposed to the processes involved. Every school in Morgan and Hansen's (2007) study employed an external provider in some capacity. The external providers delivered 17 physical activities, the most popular of which were

Australian football/rugby league (26%), gymnastics (20%), basketball (9.2%), soccer (7.8%), and swimming (7.8%). In Williams et al.'s (in press) recent study in Queensland, Australia, approximately 84% (n=123) of all responding Queensland primary schools reported out-sourcing Health Sport and Physical Education (HSPE) work in the year prior to being surveyed. The authors received 92 descriptions of outsourced HSPE work that were categorised as Australian football, cricket or rugby league, programs that were almost solely funded, developed and delivered by state and national sport organisations.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that outside providers also work in most schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand to provide instruction in activities such as team sports, individual sports and swimming. Williams et al. (in press) presented a sad indictment on the evaluation of external providers in Australia, revealing that there is a lack of accountability. They felt that from an educational perspective it was reasonable for schools to ask who is accountable for what, how and to whom are they held accountable, and to what effect? Unfortunately, in Aotearoa/New Zealand there are also no accountability mechanisms for external providers. Given the cost and tight school budgets, the prevalence of the external providers, and the fact that they are working closely with our children, it would be valuable to know more about their learning intentions and outcomes.

The lack of accountability for outside providers suggests the need for teachers and principals to ask more critical questions about the educative value of these programs. The now eliminated Physical Education advisory team (Paterson, 2010), argued that:

*as critical consumers, as you are bombarded with well meaning outside providers, always ask the questions: [Are external providers] meeting the needs of my students? Is this linked to our school vision for our students? Will this connect with student achievement? (p. 13)*

Schools need to examine the employment of such programs from a critical perspective to ensure they are aware of how the involvement of outside providers influences student experiences.

Another type of externally provided programs in schools is demonstrated by Project Energise (Rush et al., 2011). This project is funded by the Waikato District Health Board and is designed to improve the health of primary school children in the Waikato area. The program employs 27 'energisers' who each work with a group of schools to "improve the health of their students by facilitating with-in school changes to improve physical activity and nutrition" (Rush et al., 2011, p. 2). This is a significant project that has run from 2004, is funded at \$1,907k in 2011 and reaches 44,000 children or approximately 10% of the primary school population of New Zealand. The program does not promote itself as physical education, instead concentrates on emphasising physical activity and fitness with the intention of having a major impact on the levels of in-school movement and activity of primary school students. Such a program generates a number of questions including whether it is in reality any different to what happens under the name of physical education in schools. This paper is not the place to critique such programs but it is important to acknowledge their presence and the potential challenges and opportunities they offer for physical education.

## **The preparation of primary teachers to teach physical education**

One factor that is crucial to the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in primary schools is the (in)adequacy of teachers' professional preparation (Morgan & Hansen, 2008). The preparation of health and physical education teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand is addressed elsewhere in this journal (see Smith & Philpot in this series); however, the importance of the issue supports specific comment around the preparation of primary teachers. Petrie (2011) argues that the general classroom teacher should teach physical education at the primary level, rather than physical education specialists. She considers that these teachers are better positioned through their understanding of the classroom context, their knowledge of the individual students in the class and the quality of their relationships with the students. While accepting that this is a powerful platform for quality teaching and learning in physical education to occur, this platform is of little relevance if the teachers have low levels of confidence and little competence in the specific curriculum area of physical education.

How well prepared then are our primary graduates to teach physical education? At present a high percentage of primary teachers come into the classrooms via one-year graduate diploma programs (P. Lind, New Zealand Teachers Council, personal correspondence, 2011), which are completed after graduation with an initial degree, a degree that often has no content knowledge related to physical education. The hours spent in learning to teach physical education for students in these programs varies between universities but has been reduced steadily in all of them. One major New Zealand university at present offers a total of ten hours over the full year for learning in health and physical education. A similar process of reducing curriculum hours has occurred in the three and four-year undergraduate degrees with other universities offering one class a total of 36 hours for health and physical education over their three-year undergraduate degree. Aligned with the reductions in curriculum time have been changes in the preferred pedagogies used by the universities, with the movement to large group lecture-based classes. This situation in New Zealand initial teacher education led to a Physical Education New Zealand (PENZ) sponsored meeting of the health and physical education curriculum leaders of all six major universities to discuss this issue in 2010. This group subsequently stated they did not believe that the students who graduated from their programs were meeting the graduating teacher standards in relation to the teaching of physical education. This statement, from the leaders of the actual university programs, gives some indication of the seriousness with which they see the situation. If we accept Petrie's argument that the classroom teacher is the preferred person to teach physical education in primary schools it should only be with the very strong proviso that the teachers are adequately prepared with sufficient curriculum knowledge, subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Tsangaridou, 2006) to teach the subject competently.

## **Research on primary school physical education in Aotearoa New Zealand**

There is a paucity of research at the primary level in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Nonetheless, it is interesting to consider how primary school students feel about physical education. Students' feelings towards different areas of the curriculum have been examined through the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) program which investigates all areas of the Aotearoa/New Zealand curriculum in four-yearly cycles. The popularity of physical education was shown by it being selected

as the favourite out of all learning areas in the curriculum for year eight students (12 year-olds) and the second favourite for year four students (8 year-olds) in 1998, 2002 and then again in 2006. This finding potentially provides a paradox, given the above comments related to initial teacher education, the conceptual confusion among teachers and concerns about the quality of teaching in physical education. Anecdotally, when observing children, we have noticed that 'kids like playing' and 'kids like moving' and when we ask children in a national questionnaire what do you like best – PE and going outside or sitting in class – it is not hard to imagine that they might state that PE is one of their favourite curriculum areas. While a number of alternative explanations could be offered it is suggested that further research is needed to establish the reality of the situation.

There has been little examination of the pedagogical approaches used by New Zealand primary teachers in the teaching of physical education. Petrie (2008) interviewed 27 and surveyed 75 generalist teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand about their physical education programs and practices. She found that:

*Regardless of the topic or focus, the majority of lessons followed a similar format: warm-up or energizer activity, skill teaching/practices, minor games (or races), and warm down. In relation to the 'spectrum of teaching styles' teachers appear to present PE lessons using predominately command and practice. (p. 70)*

Petrie's findings are aligned with those in other countries where the use of teacher directed pedagogy in physical education as the preferred approach is well documented. The resilience of this pedagogical approach within primary physical education is perhaps surprising for a number of reasons.

Firstly, student-centred pedagogies are well established in a number of other curriculum areas. It could therefore be assumed that primary school teachers are knowledgeable, comfortable and convinced of the educational value of learner-centred pedagogies in facilitating quality teaching and learning. As Petrie commented, "this [teacher-directed teaching in physical education] is inconsistent with the student-centered approaches generally accepted and advocated in other curriculum areas" (p. 70). This point was also made by the physical educator advisors (Paterson, 2010) who commented, with a degree of frustration that "it is important to, if nothing else, transfer the learning from other professional development about quality teaching to physical education" (p. 13). Secondly, a number of well-established student-centred pedagogical approaches to the teaching of physical education are 'teacher tested' and readily available to teachers of physical education. These include, but are not restricted to, Teaching Games for Understanding (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982; Griffin & Butler, 2005), Cooperative Learning (Dyson, Lineham, Rhodes, & Hastie, 2010), Teaching (Taking) Personal and Social Responsibility (Hellison, 2008), Sport Education (Siedentop, 2002) and a number of approaches from Mosston (1981) spectrum of teaching styles. These pedagogical approaches or models have been promoted as effective ways of teaching physical education through a variety of means including initial teacher education, professional development programs and through conferences and numerous articles. The educational value of these approaches has been reinforced by the ongoing interest of those researching in physical education teacher education and by the time spent adapting these approaches to meet the needs of contemporary physical education. While many appear to have become established in secondary schools, they do not appear to have achieved the same presence in primary school physical education.

A third reason that would suggest that primary physical education practice should have moved further towards student-centred pedagogies is the direction in the *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) and the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). The *New Zealand Curriculum* is clear in the importance it places on teachers using research-supported effective pedagogies. The teaching approaches identified include facilitated shared learning, teaching as inquiry and encouraging reflective thought and action. These approaches are to a large degree not aligned with the teacher directed approach used by many teachers in primary physical education.

In one attempt to increase the quality and quantity of children's physical activity and physical education a pilot physical activity project was trialed in 15 primary schools in Christchurch and Auckland, New Zealand (Cowley, Hamlin, Grimley, Hargreaves, & Price, 2009). Two key factors were identified as central to the success of the program. The first was the role of the physical activity coordinator (PAC) in providing physical activity opportunities outside timetabled school time and the second was the professional development program provided for the lead teachers and teachers in the pilot schools.

Cowley et al. (2009) also reported that the two agencies supporting this program – the Ministry of Education and Sport and Recreation in New Zealand (SPARC) – considered that two mechanisms helped maintain a high level of children's physical activity in the years following the completion of this pilot. The first was that the program provided opportunities for New Zealand primary schools to access physical education professional development and the second was that the active school advisers (similar to the PAC) supported and enhanced the physical activity programs in their schools. Ironically only two years later in 2011, the government has eliminated the physical education advisory staff and minimal professional development is occurring in primary school physical education. While professional development would appear to be useful for teachers and hopefully well utilised, this is not always the case. Recently PENZ, for example, offered primary physical education workshops throughout the country. In Auckland, out of the hundreds of primary school teachers who could have attended there were only 12 participants.

## Concluding comments

This paper examines primary school physical education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We have explored the potential of the Physical Education Curriculum at primary level and believe that real educative value will only be achieved when its conceptual and philosophical underpinnings are fully and consistently understood and implemented in schools. The 'muddled thinking' as defined by Culpan (2005) about the purpose of physical education and the inconsistencies in practice between the various educational and sporting stakeholders is considered a major limitation for physical education practice (Dyson & Shulruf, in preparation).

A number of other factors have also been identified as impacting on the quality of teaching and learning in physical education. The first is the inadequate preparation of teachers to teach physical education in primary schools, a problem compounded by the limited professional development opportunities available to support teachers once they are in schools. There is

insufficient curriculum knowledge, subject content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge at the primary level. The elimination of the advisory service in physical education, in response to the tightening of fiscal budgets and the government focus on numeracy and literacy, has been particularly detrimental. The escalation in the numbers of schools using outside providers to teach a compulsory learning area within the New Zealand curriculum is a strong indication that they do not believe they can meet their obligations from within their own resources. We are concerned, along with our colleagues in Australia (Morgan & Hansen, 2007, 2008; Williams et al., in press), that outside providers are now ubiquitous in our primary schools and suggest that these programs need to be evaluated carefully for their learning intentions and outcomes.

When considering physical education in primary schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand it is apparent that there is limited empirical evidence on what is occurring in schools in the name of physical education. The question of 'what is physical education in primary schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand?' still remains largely unanswered and we believe that there is a need for extensive research in the future. This research should explore curriculum development, pedagogical practices in physical education, support for teachers, teacher preparation in physical education, and the use of outside providers in schools. We hold genuine concerns for the quality of physical education in primary schools and the place of physical education within the New Zealand Curriculum.

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